

A RETROSPECTIVE OF A.K. RAINA



Subconscious Indulgence

When boundaries of the objective world extend, we travel through the mist of time to catch a glimpse of those nostalgic moments.

A.K. Raina, an artist from the beautiful valley of Kashmir, recreates the sublime surroundings on his canvas with lively strokes of colours.

His work is an unstoppable expression of

*"Gar-Bar-ru-e-zamin Ast;
Hamin Ast, Hamin Ast, Hamin Ast"*

Silver radiance of serene lakes, splendid rivers and snow capped mountain peaks, the beauty of Kashmir Valley is beyond the scope of words. Raina's work is a perfect blend of beauty, radiance, purity and freshness. He truly celebrates his subconscious indulgence.

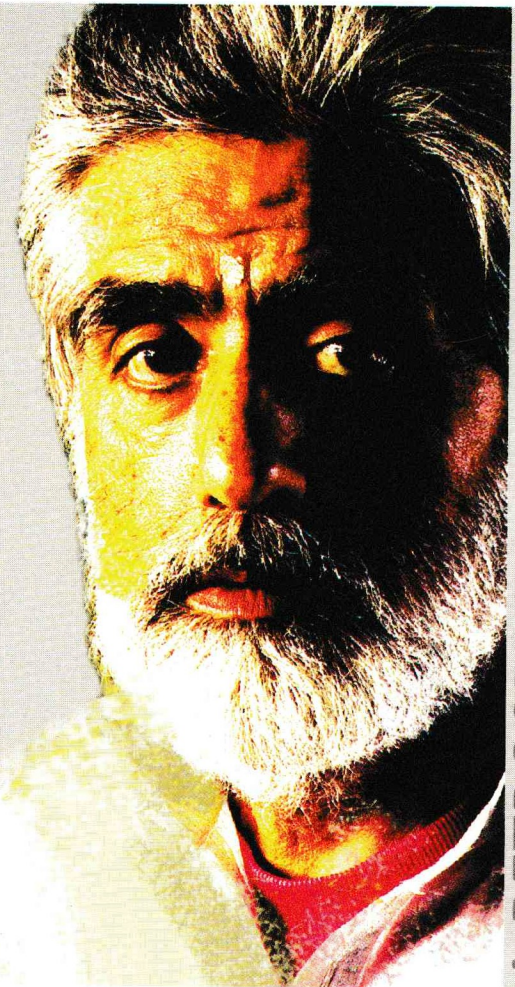
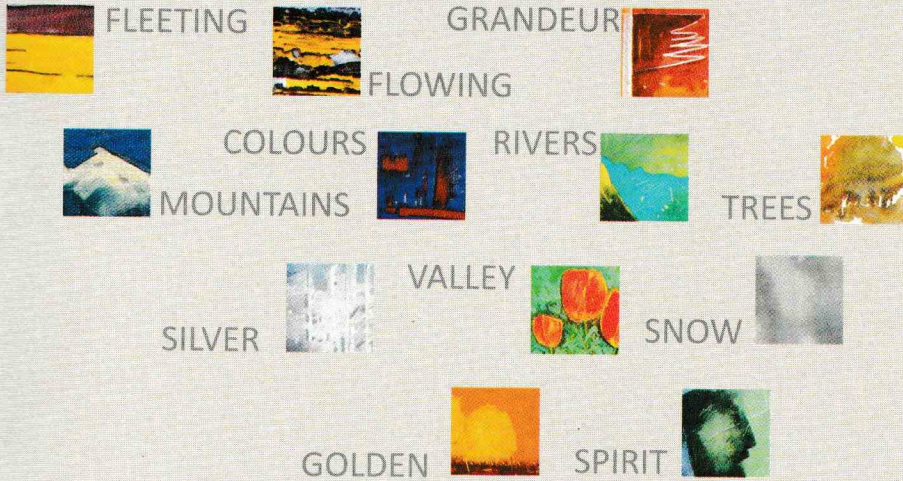
*-Pankaj Agrawal
MARM*



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

I am inspired by the creations of divine nature around my home which was in Kashmir. The forms and shapes, colours and varying light have moved me from my childhood.

The terrain changing from smooth rolling hills to massive mountain peaks have motivated my creativity. A close study of rocks and mountains is reflected



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in texture on the canvas which becomes softer and smoother eventually.

My works though purely abstract have a close link with the landscape of Kashmir. Majestic mountains and mysterious rocks carved by nature standing as silent witness to our history have fascinated me and take me back to the beginning of time...

A.K. Raina



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

I have been watching A.K. Raina's growth as a painter for more than twenty five years. Being a close artist friend, I am very much aware of his different phases of development as an artist. To me, art is a manifestation of perfection, already in man. It is like religion, which is the manifestation of divinity, already in man. For years Raina had been painting the power of nature in his Dal lake-resort studio in silence and solitude. There used to be some kind of perfection in terms of organisation of space and colour, very different from realistic landscapes. Landscapes with the presence of divine with aesthetic perfection. Aesthetic perfection in art, when not inspired by the desire for ultimate, degenerates into sensuality.

Raina's next phase reminds me of abstract landscapes inspired from nature and the surroundings of Kashmir, with the feeling of desire for ultimate and positivity. His paintings used to be like a marvelous dream of an artist who was awake. A dream of the world, which was nothing but mere vibration of consciousness in space with abstract forms. One, could feel from his paintings that the artist used to enjoy the delight that flows from peace.

The different minds of the surroundings of his studio in Kashmir were heading towards calamity, first created delusion and wickedness: and then those, later expanded into misfortune and sorrow. His studio along with hundreds of paintings was burnt into ashes. This very incident affected the subconscious world of this artist and resulted in the present phase of power and vigour. Away from his place, where the mind was well controlled and firmly established in peace, a great tide inside the subconscious resulted in some powerful paintings.

Raina's present phase seems to be an honest expression as to what happened to his surroundings in Kashmir. The usual stance of the modernist painter is to have no truck with his community or responsibility towards the human. Raina seems to have recognised this obligations beyond the claimed freedom of an artist. Even if he is using the most abstract forms to express his feelings, one can easily relate to the facts of life. Most of his recent paintings give me the feeling of the present turmoil, the divided minds, the shattered windows, the abandoned houses and the beauty turned into ugliness.

I strongly believe that Raina is honestly expressing his feelings and emotions through powerful abstract visual language of art.

*Too frail the shikara
almost as light as lotus trembling on the Dal,
and the shimmering waters turn to a dark;
from the shali fields
the still singing voices of the harvesting girls -
the Sun, dead,
behind the snowed-up hills.*

*O brought-back days of quick burning youth!
Arias trailing off into temporal distances-
the haze, burying memory all so decently.*

What, have at least certain of the famed (and at moments defamed), artists in common? In other words what is their point of departure, as artists or even as they put pen to paper, brush to canvas, or what have you? For most artists the outer husk of their environs matters little. But yet the indefinable scent or sound of a place and a time, matters enormously, though obliquely. All places are alike in one way. All have 'beauty' of one order or another- if only one will look patiently, closely. So that no place on earth is special. Even so some small subtle differences remain between place and place, no matter how. I believe the Vale I speak of, has or most assuredly once had, those particular enticing spirit evoking unearthly sounds and scents to the nth degree. But even so this would be palpable only to those who were attuned to the heart of all that is immaterial, to look closely beneath the disturbed stream that life, alas, largely is.

A.K. Raina is one of those with living roots deep in a soil. Those roots will just not die, no matter he is, physically some other where. We, who have observed his paintings over some years, certainly have joyed in the choice of theme: have tried to appraise them critically; seen them in the company of fellow artists' works-the true test for any artist worth his salt. But this time round, it may be of some small profit to heed their secret lore-the flywheel that gives them their go.

Perhaps there are no 'great' ideas at the base of theme, perhaps they are short on 'noble' sentiments, so understood. But yet, in the select of these present works, there is a sure, if unheard sound that is unmistakable. This sound needs to be heard, even though it is unisistent. Is this not the near sacral sound that moves the wheels of the artist's spirit ?

No, Raina's painting fingers are not turned on by the dry docked memories of a place, but by the life still felt on the pulse. Is it not this which drives him to brush and canvas? I believe so, you may as well call it love, the love of ones own, love that is not a claimant of anything whatever, love as worship- a homage to what was, of what still is, what perhaps may still be. But this is no plain home sickness, but a secluded savouring of those infinite number of lived nuances, which are surely life supportive. All historians are, normally besotted with the more visible, outer events, the earth- shaking chronicle, of collective destinies. Artists only with the fragile. So that what we are up to in art, in this art, are hair- fine feelings such as activate the dead back to life. It is that which makes the creature breathe ozone. Thus this is an anima that may not be analysed by doctors.

We see then why Raina paints. It is the scent of the wild blossoms, that assault his nostrils; it is the shimmering snow on the top of Zabarvan. Yes, there is in a way a tortured but yet loving, caressing ghost of a world enveloping the imagination of the thus living and breathing Raina. He lives by this ghost, and the ghost will just no go away. A sweetened suffering. But in the sweet suffering is power, not the power to move thrones of states, but the power to bring life to the living dead.

But it may be that what I have incoherently muttered above makes little sense. What has pukka art to do with how you feel? Don't works of art go beyond the artist's immediate circumstances? delighting us with harmonies made up of impersonal picture planes, volumes etc. etc.? Of course, of course. So why bother with the propellents behind a canvas. Right, and yet how may the full life of art works be savoured, if indeed they have had full life of any consequence, unless we meditate the secret life of the makers? Souls that exult

and weep, in seclusion. To know this even at a gallery remove, would it not, enhance our rapport with art?

I believe Raina has honed his skills to a fine, each year raises the stature of his genre. But, thus self purified to a degree of perfection, it is what he has distilled from his labours that presently concerns us. It is the remnants and reminders of his life and time. He has salvaged precisely this. He is not living in the past, since that past is one with him, is him. A sentiment that will not die. This act of art then is a private ritual of anointing, honouring, venerating the life giving elements in this one life. And so, if you 'hear' his work closely, it comes a speech from the sougning of the chinars, of winds and waters of a soil blessed by the immortals.

Keshav Malik

कश्मीर की फिजाओं की रुमानियत ने सारी दुनिया के इंसानों के लिए एक सम्मोहन भरा आकर्षण सदियों से रच रखा है। यह आकर्षण और अधिक तब बढ़ जाता है जबकि इन्सान सर्जक हो, इसी कारण से सारी दुनिया और खास कर भारत के लगभग सभी कलाकार इस स्वर्गिक अनुभूति के लिए सदैव कश्मीर आते रहे हैं। कश्मीर की फिजाओं ने इन कलाकारों को सदैव अलौकिक रचनात्मक अनुभूतियों से नवाजा है।

वैसे तो पुरातन काल से ही कश्मीर में मिनियेचर कला में महत्वपूर्ण उपलब्धि दर्ज की थी किन्तु समय के थपेड़ों के कारण उनके प्रमाण अब उपलब्ध नहीं हैं। आधुनिक काल के अनेकों महान कलाकारों के लगातार कश्मीर प्रवास से कश्मीर में भी कला का एक महत्वपूर्ण अघोषित, अनौपचारिक केन्द्र सा बन गया था। इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ म्यूजिक एण्ड फाइन आर्ट्स के शुरू होने के बाद तो कश्मीर में रुपंकर कलाओं का आंदोलन सा खड़ा हो गया जो शिल्प और चित्रकला में अधिक मुखर हुआ। यहाँ के कलाकारों ने आधुनिक भारतीय कला के अवदान में अपनी महत्वपूर्ण उपस्थिति दर्ज की तथा कश्मीरी कला को एक महत्वपूर्ण स्थान दिलाया।

कश्मीर के इतिहास में शुरू हुए अलगाववादी और विघटनकारी दौर ने कश्मीरी सभ्यता के साथ-साथ मानवीय सभ्यता और संस्कृति का जितना विनाश किया है, उनके सामने हिटलरी विध्वंस भी बौना नज़र आता है। इस विध्वंसकारी विनाश ने मानवीय संस्कृति के साथ-साथ कश्मीर में उपजी एक खास तरह की कला का उस विध्वंस से भी अधिक नुकसान किया है। कला के बनाये उस धरोंदे को समूल नष्ट कर दिया है। किसी भी आततायी का पहला शिकार स्थानिक सर्जक ही होते हैं। अतः वह उन्हें ही अपना पहला निशाना बनाते हैं। कश्मीर के वे सारे सर्जक जिन्होंने कलाओं का एक खूबसूरत आशियाना बनाया था उसे वे अपने मन में समाये भारी कदमों और टूटे दिल से इस विनाशकारी आंधी से उजड़कर सूदूर कहीं, किसी गोशे में अपनी व्यथा अपने अंतस में दबाये अपनी रचना प्रक्रिया को बहाल किये हुए हैं।

इन्ही जलावतन कलाकारों में प्रसिद्ध चित्रकार अवतार कृष्ण रैना भी हैं। श्री रैना का जन्म 1938 में श्रीनगर में हुआ, यहाँ की सुरम्य वादियों के पाकीज़गी भरे रुहानी परिवेश ने इन्हे एक जीवट और संवेदनशील इंसान बनाने में अपनी महती भूमिका अदा की। इन वादियों के हसीन नजारों ने इनके जिस्म के रेशे-रेशे में अपना स्थाई मुकाम बना लिया। संवेदनशील स्वभाव होने के कारण बचपन से ही इनका रुझान कलात्मक दस्तकारी की ओर गया। त्रिवेन्द्रम, केरला के स्कूल ऑफ आर्ट्स में आपने लकड़ी की नक्काशी का अध्ययन किया। एक दस्तकार के रूप में इन्होंने अपने जीवन की शुरुआत की किन्तु इनका मंतव्य तो यही न था अतः अपने काम के साथ कैमरे की आँख से भी ये अपनी सर्जना को फरोग देते रहे और इनके भीतर धीरे-धीरे एक कलाकार नमूदार (प्रकट) होता रहा। सन् 1959 में अंततः इन्होंने ब्रश को गंभीरता से थाम लिया। बचपन से लेकर अब तक की उम्र तक कश्मीर को जो आँखों के ज़रिये इनकी रुह तक, नस-नस में, पोर-पोर तक इतना पैठ चुका था, उन अनुभूतियों के भराव ने इन्हें आकंट

भर दिया था, उस दबाव ने चित्र के रूप में बह निकलने का अपना रास्ता ढूँढ लिया और प्रारंभ हो गई एक अविराम कला यात्रा जो अब भी जारी है अपने मन माफिक मिली, दिखने में आसान सहज सी किंतु वास्तव में ऊबड़-खाबड़ और कटीली इस राह पर रचनात्मक रुपांतरण की अनोखी दुनिया शुरू हो गई।

दरअसल एक कलाकार ऐसा भोक्ता है, जो रचना के तनाव का जहर पीता है और प्रत्युत्तर में अमृत रूप समाज को देता है। श्री रैना की रचनाओं की दुनिया एक ऐसी खिड़की है जिसके रास्ते हम उनके द्वारा अनुभूत स्मृतियों को अनेक कालखण्डों (रचना के समयमान से) के अनुसार एक खास सिलसिले में प्रकट होता देखते हैं। यह प्रकटन वास्तव में उस देखे हुई की प्रतिच्छवि ही नहीं है, बल्कि यह उन अनुभूतियों का एक अनोखे आयाम में हमें बोध कराती हैं।

श्री रैना ने चित्रकला के सभी माध्यमों को अपने प्रयोगों की कसौटी पर परखा है और उन पर अपना कौशल, सिद्धहस्तता और नियंत्रण पाया है, फिर चाहे वह इंकड्राईंग हो, तेल और वैक्समिश्र रंग हो, वाटर कलर हो, या एकीलिक रंग हो।

शुरुआती दिनों में वे तेल रंग और वैक्स से एक खास तरह के रंग स्वयं बनाकर वापस करते थे, उन दिनों दिल्ली, बम्बई आदि कला नगरों में उत्तर प्रभाववादी शैली में नाईफ से तेल रंग वापरने का काफी प्रचलन था। शांति दवे तेल रंग और वैक्स के संयोग से एक खास तरह की अपनी शैली विकसित कर अंतर्राष्ट्रीय ख्याती अर्जित कर चुके थे तथा प्रख्यात चित्रकार जगदीश स्वामीनाथन ने भी इन्हीं तेल वैक्स रंगों का उपयोग अपनी बाद की रचनाओं में किया था। श्री रैना के तेल वैक्स रंगों से रचित चित्रों में अमूमन वही दृश्यमूलक अमूर्त रूपक रचा जा रहा था जो उनके काम में सारी उमर उनकी मूल पूंजी के रूप में, उनके अपने रचनात्मक घटक के रूप में नजर आता है। भू-दृश्यों का आभास एक खुशनुमा नज़रियों में प्रकट होता है। इनमें ऐसी गड्ड-मड्ड छवियाँ हैं जहाँ दूरी, गहराई या क्षितिज नहीं है केवल ब्रश स्ट्रोक से रचे रूपाकार हैं।

रचना की अगली अवस्था में श्री रैना के काम तकनीकी रूप से और अधिक परिपक्वता हासिल करते हैं। नाईफ का स्थान ब्रश ले लेता है और तेल रंगों का साथ वैक्स छोड़ देता है। तकनीक के इस परिवर्तन से रैना के चित्रों में एक सुखद और बड़ा फर्क नज़र आने लगता है। पहले के चित्रों का धरातल जहाँ ओपेक और कठोरता लिये नज़र आता था वह अब ब्रश के संयोग से तरलता प्राप्त करते हुए सरंध्र हो जाता है। धरातल की सख्ती मुलायम सरंध्रता में तब्दील होती जाती है। दूर तक फैला क्षितिज सपाट रंगों की सरंध्र सतहों में उभरने लगता है अतिरूप और अधिक रचनात्मक और प्रभावी होकर उभरने लगे हैं। अवकाश के विभाजन भी प्राकृतिक रूपों के अनुकूल दिखने लगे हैं। चित्र के फलक पर फ्रेम दर फ्रेम दिखते हैं।

एक चित्र में कहीं दो, कहीं तीन फ्रेम स्पष्टता में रची गई और हर फ्रेम की रचना दूसरी से भिन्न होते हुए स्लाईड की तरह अलग-अलग भागों में बटी होने के बावजूद समग्र चित्र एक

अदृश्य रचनात्मक बंध में बंधा नज़र आता है सृजन और संवेदनशील तन्मयता से चित्र में एकात्मता लगातार बनी रहती है। चित्र संवेदनशील बनने लगे हैं, उनकी ग्राह्यता और प्रक्षेपण का दायरा और शक्ति अधिक विस्तृत हुई है। यहाँ इन चित्रों में प्रेक्षक प्रकृति की उस झंकार को महसूस कर सकता है, जो दुनिया के किसी भी प्राकृतिक भू-भाग में हो सकती है। अर्थात् हमें किसी विशिष्ट दिन और काल से परे मानव को सिर्फ और सिर्फ प्रकृति की सुरम्य अनुभूतियाँ जोड़ती है। श्री रैना ने कश्मीर की सुरम्य वादियों को देखा और महसूस किया है और उसकी तफ़सील से भी वे वाकिफ़ हैं, प्रकृति में मानव निर्मित संरचनाओं का भी उन्होंने अध्ययन किया है किन्तु इनके अभी के सृजन में मानव निर्मित जड़ वस्तुओं के बजाये केवल प्रकृति की निर्मल छटाओं और वैभव ने ही अपनी जगह बनाई है इससे इनके ये चित्र अत्यधिक संवेदनशील और सार्वभौमिक ग्राह्यता प्राप्त कर पाते हैं। इस प्रकार का अद्भुत सृजन, रैना ने अपने चित्रों में अभिनीत किया है।

इन सृजनात्मक अनुभूतियों से उपजे बिम्बों के माध्यम से हम उस वास्तव रूप को तो नहीं ही देख पाते हैं, बल्कि इन सृजित रूपों के माध्यम से उस विराट रूप का, जो उज्ज्वल भी है, श्याम भी है और घूसर भी है का एहसास उसकी शक्ति, उसकी संरघ्रता, उसकी कोमलता आदि के भावों का बोध जो एक सा नहीं रहता है परिवेश के साथ हमेशा बदलता रहता है, और एक विशिष्ट प्रकार का नज़री तरोताज़ापन (Visual Freshness) हम लगातार महसूस करते रहते हैं।

श्री रैना ने अपने नज़री अनुभव को अपने भीतर इतना अधिक परिपक्व किया है कि उनके रंग अपनी एक सार्थक और लचीली पहचान बनाते हैं जहाँ जड़ता को कोई मुकाम न हो कर प्रवर्तनशील बहाव को हमेशा तरजीह दी गई है। श्री रैना के रंग चाहे सुबह के हों, चढ़ते हुए दिन के, ढलती दोपहर के हों, शाम के हों या गहराती रात के इनमें एक खास तरह का सुथरापन (Correctness) हमेशा मौजूद होता है, जो समकालीन कला में वापरे जा रहे चकाचौंध भरे तीखें उबाऊ व्याख्याओं से लबरेज रंगों/रूपों से अलग एक निखरे हुए रूप में अपने रूपकों को परावर्तित करते हैं।

श्री रैना के चित्रों में चित्रकारी के तमाम अकादमीक माप-मानों के परे अपने माप-मान स्थानिकता और हिंदुस्तानी कलेवर के अनुरूप अपने माप-मान बनाए हैं। यहाँ दूरियाँ और गहराई हिंदुस्तानी मिनीयेचर चित्रों के बरअक्स रंगों/आकारों के सपाट सूझ-बूझ पूर्ण रख-रखाव से उपस्थित हुई है। न कि आकारों का संभ्रम पैदा कर दृश्य भ्रांती पैदा की गई है।

1996 के बाद की कृतियों में कुछ आसामान्य परिवर्तन नज़र आने लगते हैं जिससे चित्र के प्रभाव में गुणात्मक अभिवृद्धि होती नज़र आती है। इन कामों के रूपक और रंग तो पहले जैसे ही है किन्तु इनमें लम्बाई और चौड़ाई के अतिरिक्त तीसरी डाईमेंशन की अनुभूति भी होती दिखती है। जैसे आतिशबाजी के दिप्तमान चिलके गहरे अवकाश को रौशन प्रफुल्लता से भर देते हैं, वैसे ही चित्रों के फलकों पर ताज़ा रंगों से चमचमाती

चिलकियाँ उभरने लगी हैं। जिससे महसूस होता है कि सारी सृष्टि उल्लासित हो प्रेममय श्रेष्ठी गीत गाने लगी हैं, उसका उल्लास इन चमकदार रोशनी के चिलकों में व्यक्त हो रहा है। इन चिलकियों से चित्रों में एक और चीज़ उभरती है जिससे चित्र के भाव विस्तार में काफी वृद्धि नज़र आती है और वो तीसरी डायमेंशन की हवा के रूप में अनुभूति इन प्रकाशमय चिलकियों और पार्श्व के मध्य बहुत गहराई नज़र आने लगती है और लगता है जैसे दृश्य फलक पर प्रेक्षक और दृश्य के बीच लहराती और गुनगुनाती हवा बह रही है और दृश्य मीलों दूर पीछे की ओर सरक गया है।

श्री रैना लगातार काम करने वाले और बैचन किस्म के इंसान हैं काम के दौरान बेकार कागज़ों, वाईन, सिगरेट और अन्य चीज़ों के खाली खोके भी इनकी रचनात्मक क्रियाशीलता का शिकार होकर एक कलाकृति में तब्दील हो जाते हैं। इन्क और पेन तथा रंगों के लगातार प्रयोग करके श्री रैना अपनी रचनात्मकता में लगातार अभिवृद्धि करते रहते हैं।

मानव की मानसिक और भौतिक परिस्थितियाँ कलाकार के सृजन पर धीरे-धीरे असर डालती हैं और हम कलाकार के सृजन के ज़रिये उनकी मनःस्थितियों की पड़ताल भी कर सकते हैं। श्री रैना के हाल ही के काम हम धैर्य के साथ देखें तो हमें उनकी मनःस्थिति और उनकी अविराम कला यात्रा के निष्कर्ष हमें महसूस होंगे।

इनके हाल ही के चित्रों में हम प्रकृति के उस विराट रूप को खोता हुआ पाते हैं जिनसे काफी अरसे से वे दूर हो चुके हैं और उनके कैमरे का फोकस विस्तार छोड़ कर डिटेल् पकड़ने के लिये पास चला आया है। रास्ते में झुरमुट कहीं खो गये हैं और हम आड़ी-खड़ी राख हो चुकी, सतहों के कहीं और करीब चले आते हैं और उसमें जला खाक हुआ वजूद देखते हैं इसके साथ ही चित्र फलक पर कुछ उदास कश्मीरी पैरहन नज़र आने लगे हैं जो जले और उजड़े विराने में अपने जीवन की आस, रोशनी ढूँढ़ रहे हों। रैना के अभी के चित्रों में खुशनुमाई और जीवंत रंगों में जीवनता भी कम हुई है। अपने मिट्टी से अलगाव ने उन पर धीरे-धीरे असर डाला है।

सृजक के अपने अवसाद ने सृजक को कहीं बहुत गहरे से घेर लिया है और वह सृजनात्मक अस्त्रों से उनसे जूझ रहा है, अंततः वह सिर्फ अपनी सृजन शक्ति से ही इस अवसाद से उबर सकेगा और उसके उल्लासित और खुशनुमा रंग फिर से कैनवास पर लौट आएंगे।

अनीस नियाज़ी



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

This painter once lived in idyllic surroundings, next to Shalimar Gardens outside Srinagar. Here were shoals of flowers in spring or summer, or else the multitudinous snowdrops. The grass overspreading the garden may well have been his delight. Across the valley, the immense green valley, white peaks rose against the sky. Whiteness of snowdrops, the purity of light: the secret intimacy of flowers in the foreground; the elemental vastness of the far-flung lower hill and skies: this was his world, the country of his imagination.

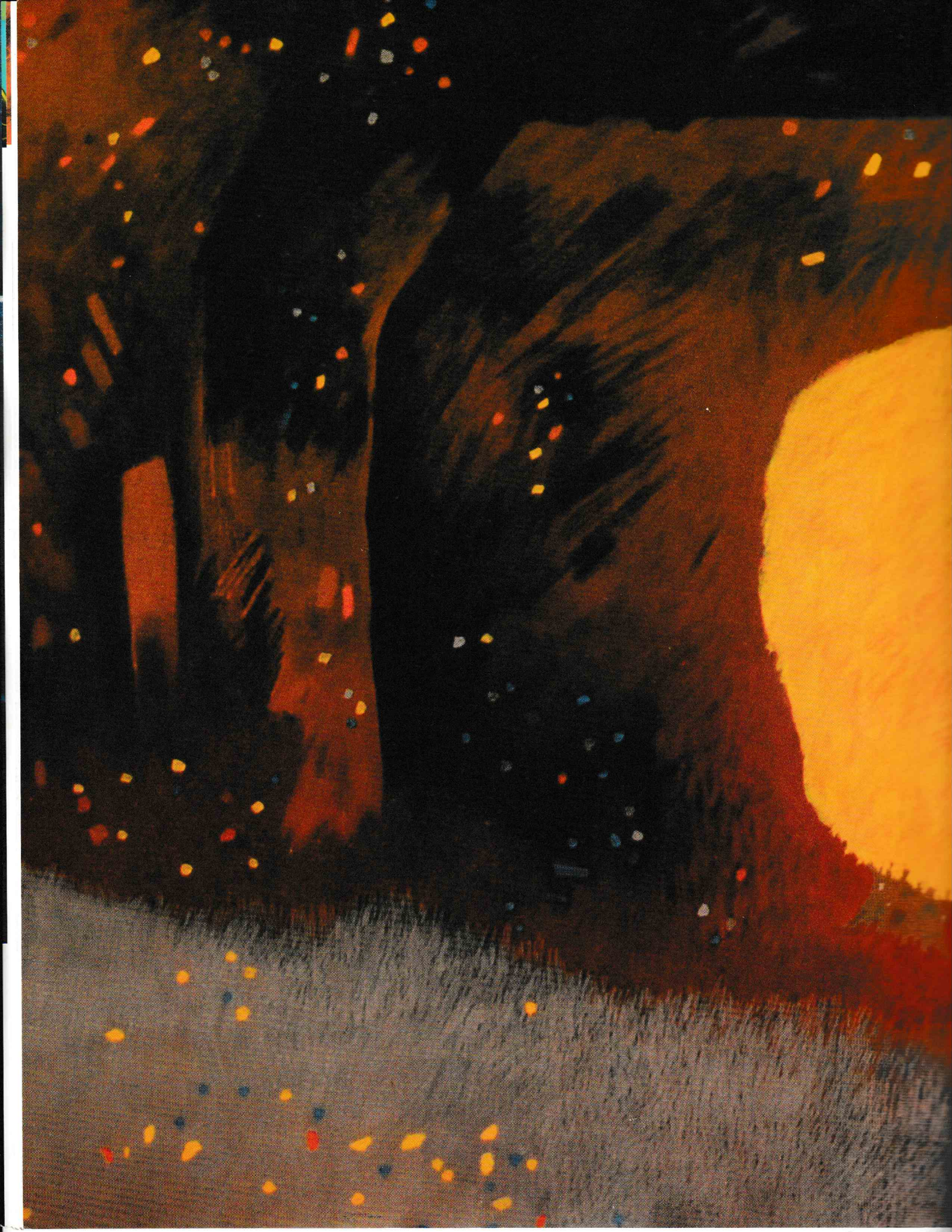
For A.K. Raina the wonder of creation, then was never an esoteric thing-remote, calculated, difficult, but immediately and perpetually perceptible. He nevertheless never painted flowers, grasses or the mountains, but rather his wonder of them. And this 'wonder' found its most luminous expression in the body of his work particularly the one he puts up right now-most of it in acrylic, some of it watercolour. All these works are fresh, recreative and companionable. His is a happy art despite all the travails he has undergone during these past few trying years, an art that is radiant, without a trace of suffering. It is remarkable that the painter has kept a level head despite the great provocation from the times. It is therefore an art of much subtlety and sophistication with an intensity of direct observation and feeling. In other words it is refined, impassioned and unfettered.

The artist has of course something in common with certain of the painters of the century, but he always follows his own path. In innumerable edenic images, he celebrates his feeling for the vivid consciousness of life expressed in nature. Such work is done with a magical simplicity and miraculous economy. This is certainly true of the chosen of the works. Here the artist has entered, by a kind of love, into union with the life that inheres in the sprit of forms, as in the light that emanates from the spectrum of colours.

In such work he explores a variety of formal resolutions of the possibilities opened up by a process of simplification derived from the originals in nature-grasses, trees, hills and dales: the geometry and hues of mother earth. A treat!

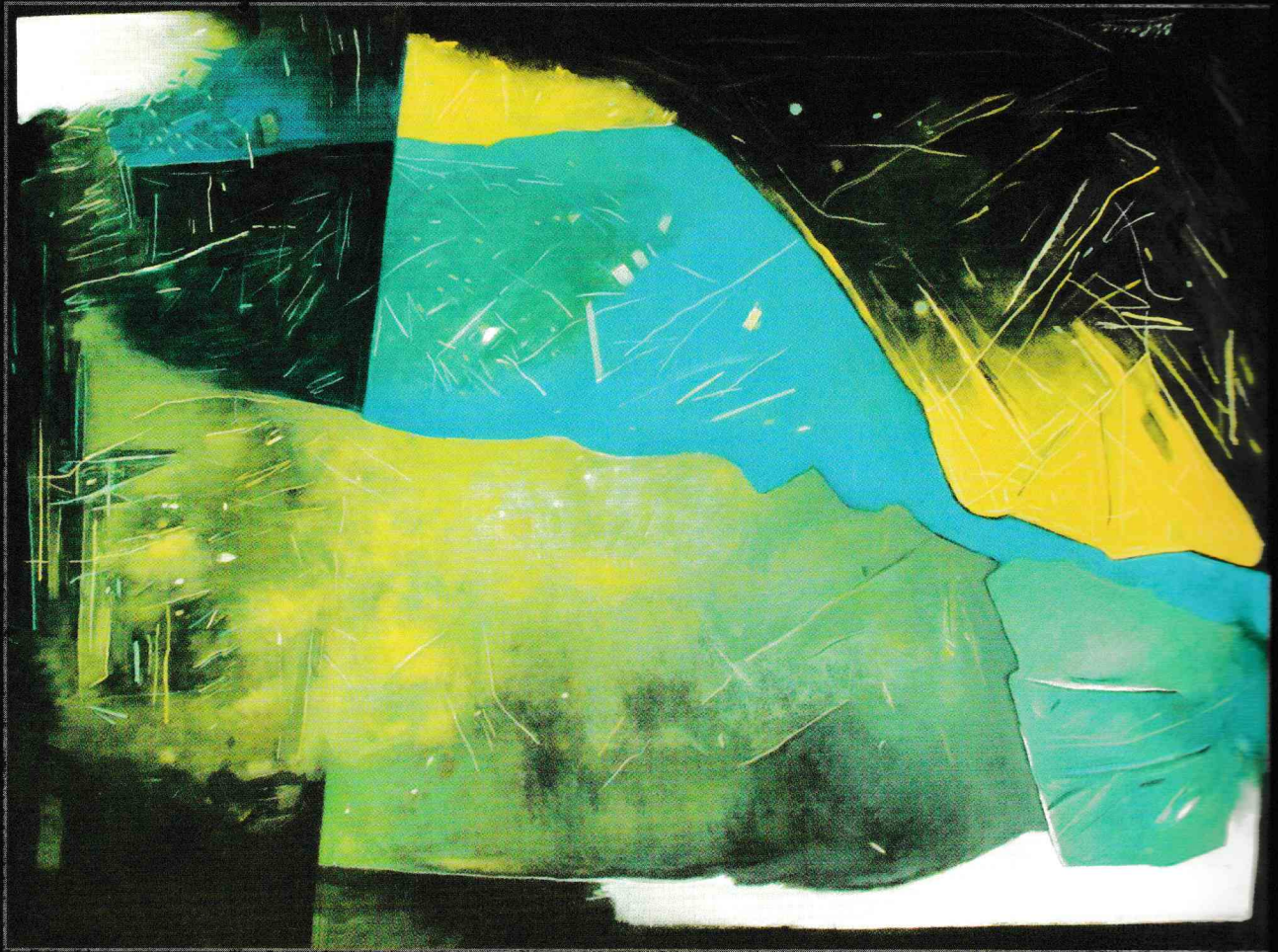
Keshav Malik









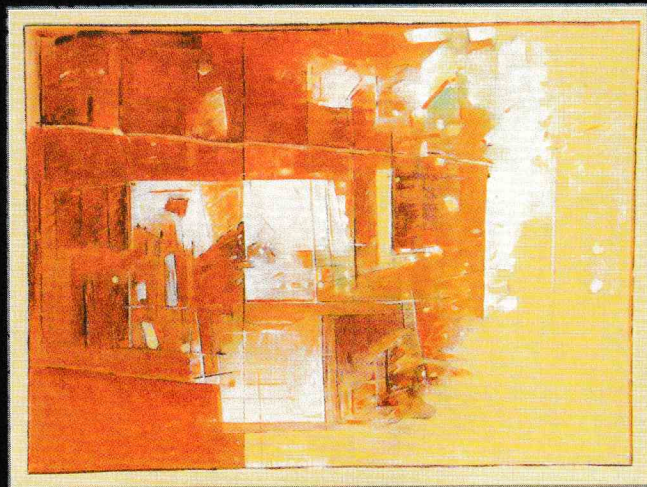




ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 24 x 18 IN.



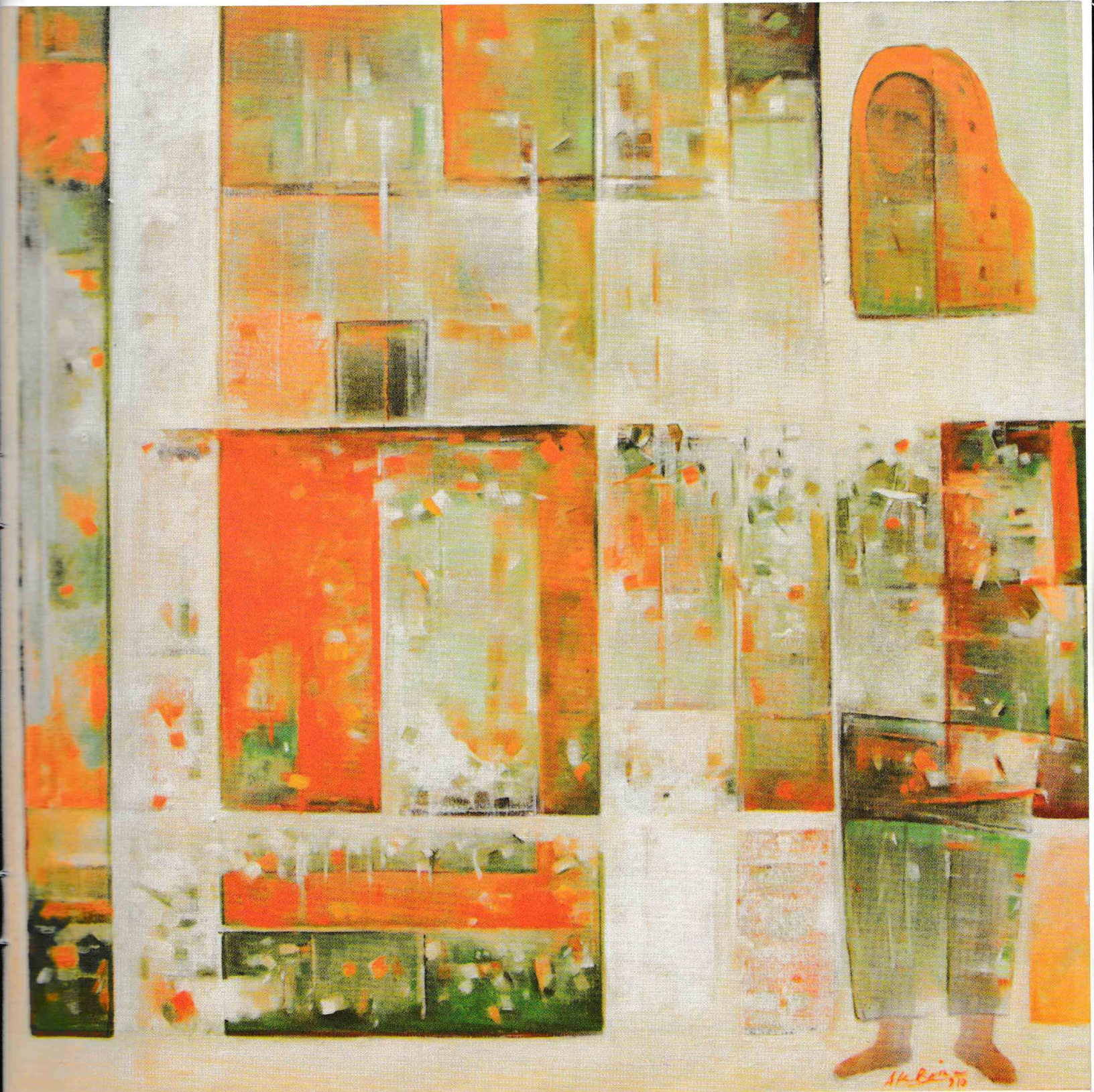
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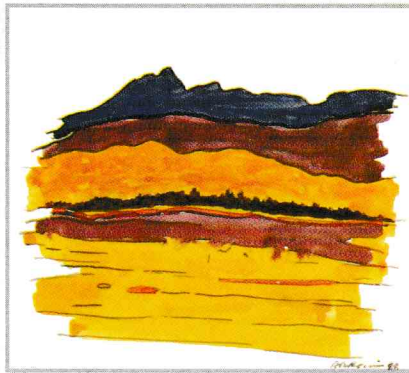
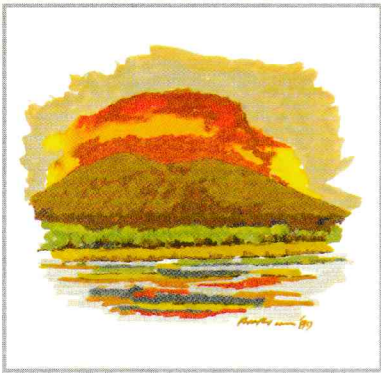
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 24 x 18 IN.



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 24 x 18 IN.



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 36 X 36 IN.





Landscaping is the
finest of arts

A. K. Raina is one of the finest landscapists from Kashmir (now settled in Madhya Pradesh.) He has developed landscaping into a contemporary/mod art that allows the natural dish to be viewed from a very different perspective as well as from several curtains of mood and hues. In the display of his works at the Ravi Jain International Art Centre, C.P. New Delhi, one could see several views, with different tonalities within the same frame. There are hills, vistas and valleys that open their natural treasures, in the most beautiful terms, before the lower of nature at various times at sunset, sunrise and in the early hours of the darkening evening when the sky assumes a dark tone and the snow clad mountains turn grey or fiery peaked with the residual sunlights.

Raina also divides his canvas into two sections, a continuation from his earlier practice, each one of them giving the view of the valley at different times of the day. But of late he has improved upon it and has started screening part of the canvas to present a section time-constant - And if he wishes to present more than two views, he partitions the main image into three or four sub-images to give the viewer some idea of what the changing scenario the Kashmiri landscape is where in the hourly changing light drenches the whole landscape into varying hues and moods, a play that could be seen only in the valley of Kashmir.

Raina's could also be credited with mastering every hue in the two parts of

the spectrum - cold as well as warm. So while blues and greys dominate his nocturnal scenes, with some light glimmering from a house or tow in the distance and coloured snow flakes falling from the high heavens, reds dominate when the scape is at the time of sunset, slipping from orange, red to dark browns that tell a tale of their own. However, one finds enough of green in Raina's scapes from the Valley, which is now only a memory, to delight him or her with the vibrancy of the verdure. And it is a special green in the valley, almost half transparent like the green of the bottle that gives a different feeling when viewed than if one looked at opaque green. And so it goes with the blues, the nocturnal element in Raina's landscapes. The blue ranges from light, as that of the lake surface to the dark hues of the late evening and the blue-black of hour just before the crowding of the night above the mountains.

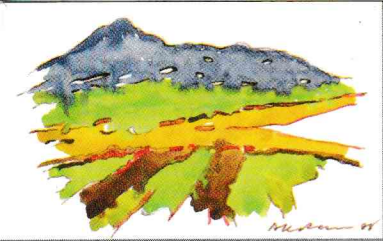
Raina also creates a very different type of perspective when he places hills behind hills separated in the distance from the sky above. Often the snow clad areas in the distance, between the heavens and the hills, give us a soothing feeling, a feeling of tranquillity both on the hill-tops and beyond. Thus it is the stability of the scape, its colours and the moods within the picture space that delight the viewer most. And then one also notices, side by side that compositionally the plethora of works are quite strong. Nothing stagnates herein and the colour areas and structures are pretty sound. Both

contrast as well as harmony inform Raina's works and one can hardly say that there is a pattern about these scapes. The only thing that is consistent herein is his approach, the way of looking at things with a sensitive, beauty-loving eye - an eye that not only sees beauty but also translates it into equally lovable visuals. Of course most of the works are large enough to provide the detailed elements of the landscapes. But there are also smaller works wherein the picture space has been handled more endearingly and thus miniaturisation has resulted into tighter picture-space control.

A. K. Raina has been on the Indian art scene for quite some time and as such has carved a niche for himself as a fine landscapist from the Valley of Kashmir (another fine landscapist from the Valley was the late Bansi Parimu who laid the foundation for modern landscaping in Kashmir after some early old timers like Wali). It could therefore be said that A.K. Raina is keeping the Valley landscaping tradition alive though he like the late, Manohar Kaul has been far removed from the scene.

Raina by now has held several solo shows in the capital and in other art theaters of the country, productive as he is and has found a place with prestigious art collecting individuals and institutions.

R.S. Yadav



PARADISE NOT LOST

Bullet-shattered Kashmir may be called a "paradise lost" but for this painter from the Valley, his homeland is still a haven and all we need "are Wordsworthian inner eyes to see it." Artist A. K. Raina takes his viewers on a trip through Kashmir's sighing chinars, rippling mountain streams and whispering winds at his exhibition, Valley of Kashmir 2005. This third solo exhibition by the artist showcases more than 30 paintings capturing the natural beauty of Kashmir.

Raina's imagination brings to life the green hills and valleys, the glaciers, the snow-capped Himalayan peaks, the grandeur of light and colours during the change of seasons on the canvas. His graphic landscapes reflect a simplicity in the use of colours, focusing more on the value of each shade than the actual form.

Though his strokes are abstract, his play of colours transcends art forms and tell his audience the story of "his peaceful" Kashmir. A white patch may be a snow clad mountain peak or a glacier; the emerald stroke a lake or a dark pine forest and blues may reflect free flowing rivulets, willow groves or majestic chinars. Raina said "Every person will interpret my work in his or her own way. But these colours follow me and the natural grandeur of the region rises in my mind whenever I paint. So, that's what my canvasses speak. I can't visualise Kashmir in any other way. I can never forget the majesty of its mountains and the mystery of the expansive nature."

In seemingly meaningless strokes, he skillfully captures the fleeting moments on his canvas in a perspective that is more innovative and not

realistic. Raina, however, likes to categorise his work as semi-abstract.

The Valley of Raina's childhood has become an abstract relation of space and colour that is well protected in his subconscious mind. He says, "The Kashmir Valley has provided me not only sensuous pleasure but has also inspired me to be a painter with quest. Though away from home, I am always conscious of the inspiring nature and it influences every aspect of my mind."

Raina captures Kashmir almost philosophically, inspired by renowned Kashmiri poets. Confesses the artist, "Lal Ded's poetry on nature and Kashmir, the philosophy behind them, have strongly inspired me. I came closer to nature after reading her philosophy. This is reflected in my art."

But like any other artist, Raina too has evolved through the years. And he accepts that while his earlier work was wild, it has become simplified and softer. But this small deviation creates more enduring interest. He says with the same simplicity as his work that he does not want to experiment with new subject. "I am satisfied capturing landscapes."

So, does the present violence disturb him?

"It does. I left Kashmir 16 years ago and it pains to visit my motherland as a guest. However, this does not affect my art as the paradise is not lost in my subconscious. My Valley will always be green." He insists he is not living in the past since the past is ingrained within him. It is his self-imposed serenity that protects him from the grief over the loss of paradise. But he is not as immune as he claims to be. At times, Raina's work betrays his inner turbulence. It shows in the contrast between the remote mountains and the lava-like explosions of colour accompanying them.

THE PIONEER | New Delhi | Dec 31, 2005

REFLECTING THE NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

Raina's paintings reflect the natural surroundings of the stunning mountain state. There is an element of poignancy in his paintings as they also in a subtle way point out how the artist misses his homeland, which he was forced to abandon because of the strife there.

THE TRIBUNE | New Delhi | Dec 31, 2005

LONGING FOR KASHMIR

The expression of agony is obvious on his face when artist A. K. Raina talks about Kashmir. He might have been residing in Indore for the past 15 years but the Valley is still his home. "I've been away from Kashmir for years but even now when I paint, I'm mentally there," says the artist who recently showed his works in a solo exhibition in New Delhi. Raina admits, "sadly, we have lost the paradise that Kashmir was once," but his recent exhibition, Valley of Kashmir, doesn't reflect pain or sorrow but depicts the beauty of nature instead.

Using acrylic as his medium, there is a delightful blend of colours in Raina's paintings. "I've been cradled by nature in her lap in my childhood. My surroundings made me a painter with quest, compelling me to give expression to the intense, bright and clear surroundings created by nature around me. I paint my vivid recollections of life. The mountain peaks, glaciers, the lakes, forests, willow groves, pines and deodars and the majestic chinars are the images that strike me when I paint," he says with a strong sense of longing for his home state. Raina holds exhibition of the works in the city quite often but he says that money is not what his concern is. "My main concern is not how many people buy my works but that people should like my paintings," he says.

HINDUSTHAN TIMES CITY | Delhi | Dec 31, 2005

ARTIST TRACES KASHMIR'S WOUNDS IN ABSTRACT LINES

A. K. Raina, who works from his studio in Indore is now in the city with 38 of his recent works. Born in Srinagar in 1938 and brought up in the Kashmir valley, Raina used to stay at Harwan in Srinagar district, "a paradise on earth, with flower beds, Chinar trees and a beautiful lake". It was in 1992 when the terrorists burnt down the place and Raina was one of them. But the nostalgia remains. "Every work shows that deep mark Kashmir has left on me. Kashmir for me is a special place and it is reflected in my work," Raina said.

Raina's works mostly on the abstract side have a figurative element too. Chinar trees, lakes, valleys and mountains can be seen in some of his works. "I don't have a pre-conceived theme when I start painting. The first stroke of the paints is a problem, but once it is done the painting evolves itself," Raina said.

The paintings made on both large and small canvas are all done in acrylic. "Acrylic suits my temperament. With acrylic, one has to be fast with his strokes and confident as there is no way to correct," Raina said.



If the beauty of Kashmir manifests in his paintings, does the injustice done to him, as he was forced to leave his home, reflect in his works? "No. I am not a propagandist. For me paintings come from within. In 1992, I did feel wronged and it reflected in my work then, but not now. The recent earthquake in Kashmir moved me and there is a painting in the exhibition that shows my feeling." He points towards a painting, an abstract executed in dull colours.

THE ASIAN AGE | New Delhi | Dec 29, 2005

MIGHTY PENS ON A. K. RAINA

A Contemplation of the macrocosm.....

The goings on in the bullet shattered Kashmir, has not led merely to the creation of bloody and melodramatic canvasses by the valley's painters. That would be too banal. A.K. Raina at least has kept his cool, concentrating only on the light above the murk. He is not saying much, in words. But even when keeping largely mum, he makes us sense the silent holiness that is quite different from routine religiosity.

The painter's best work, pleads not tourism, but a wordsworthian inner eye, or the contemplation of the macrocosm in its starting rainbow colours. Such a felt remembrance frees us of our meanness. At least four of Raina's landscapes by the simple device of compounding images, treble their imaginative strength, and are not the usual ware in the genre. In certain works, the unique characteristics of the valley have been captured in a nutshell. His works bring us close to the intuition of the power and glory of the greater world within which lies our microscopic and ephemeral one.

TIMES OF INDIA | New Delhi | APR 11, 1991

DESIGNS IN NATURE

As a Kashmiri artist, A. K. has a built in love for nature; the green hills and valleys, the snow capped peaks, the grandeur of light and colours during change of seasons. A. K.'s landscapes have a graphic simplicity in their colour areas, focusing more on the colour values and the directions of the painted areas than on painterly brush work, and some of them are remarkable for their design value. A. K. divides his canvasses in 'frames' of oblong, breaking the continuous surface in rectangles, which give them a kind of intensity.

In his paintings, the massive shoulders of the mountains become a play of colour diagonals. The charm of the painting lies in its economy of pictorial means...

INDIAN EXPRESS | New Delhi | APR 14, 1991



THE INNER LIFE OF LANDSCAPES

The mountains and rolling hills of the Kashmir valley of Raina's childhood become abstract relations of space and colour, protected by a hard and smooth exterior. At the same time their self imposed serenity protects from the grief over the loss of paradise. But Raina's works still betray their inner turbulence in the contrast that exists in his canvasses between the remote mountain forms and the lava like explosions of colour that accompany them. Raina knows that he is building up an illusion, but he appears to want to remind one that all illusions are transitory...

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES | New Delhi | APR 22, 1991

SOUL-STIRRING LANDSCAPES

The emphasis with A. K. Raina rarely comes out in capturing the physical ambience of a scene, despite the fact that what we confront, to begin with, is a sort of physical content. The visual approach, let us not forget demands it.

A.K. Raina has captured the spiritual core of Kashmir cutting out the non essential though relevant.

STATESMAN | New Delhi | APR 15, 1991

CONCENTRATING ON MEGA FEEL

"It is my other self", says Raina, that walks the streets and corridors of Delhi, both god and beauty are back there-God and beauty about which the famous Kashmiri saint poetess, Lal Ded, had mused at length. "But feeling and moods are illusory. You feel them this moment and the next moment they are gone. And you are left with a kind of enrichment yet you are frustrated that they went out of your grasp. Raina tries to capture that elusive beauty, that enriching feel which nature above can give you. And during this process there is no time for detail. Going for detail makes you miss the major part of the experience. Hence his concentration on the mega feel, instead of the minute- the minute that gets you into quite another kind of involvement.

Raina in order to get the maximum of that rich experience on his canvas, uses space like the creator of the moghul miniatures. He tries to

present many glimpses of the fleeting phenomenon as compartmentalized views, integrated in a way that would give some idea of the complex and passing phenomenon- the phenomenon that is breath taking, befuddling and which transports one into quite another world.

The majesty of the mountains and the mystery locked in expansive nature is something which Raina could never put out of his mind once he became conscious of it. He would always see the majestic Himalyas standing as silent witnesses to our history- the mountains that fascinated him ever since he was born in their lap. The mountains that took him to the beginning of time-to the infinite and beyond.

EVENING NEWS | New Delhi | APR 5, 1991

HONORABLE MENTION FOR A. K. RAINA

Raina, in fact, has been long on the scene doing typical abstract landscapes of the Kashmir valley. And his style is solely his own. However there is only marginal abstraction in his works. But this small deviation creates works of enduring interest. Rich in colours Raina's landscapes depict the colourful environmental drama of the valley. Fleeting moments and fleeting colours are skillfully captured by the artist on his canvas in a perspective that is more in the category of "innovative" rather than realistic. In fact, Raina's landscapes and their colours provide more of the punch rather than a smooth perception of things within the frame.

EVENING NEWS | New Delhi | MAR 9, 1992

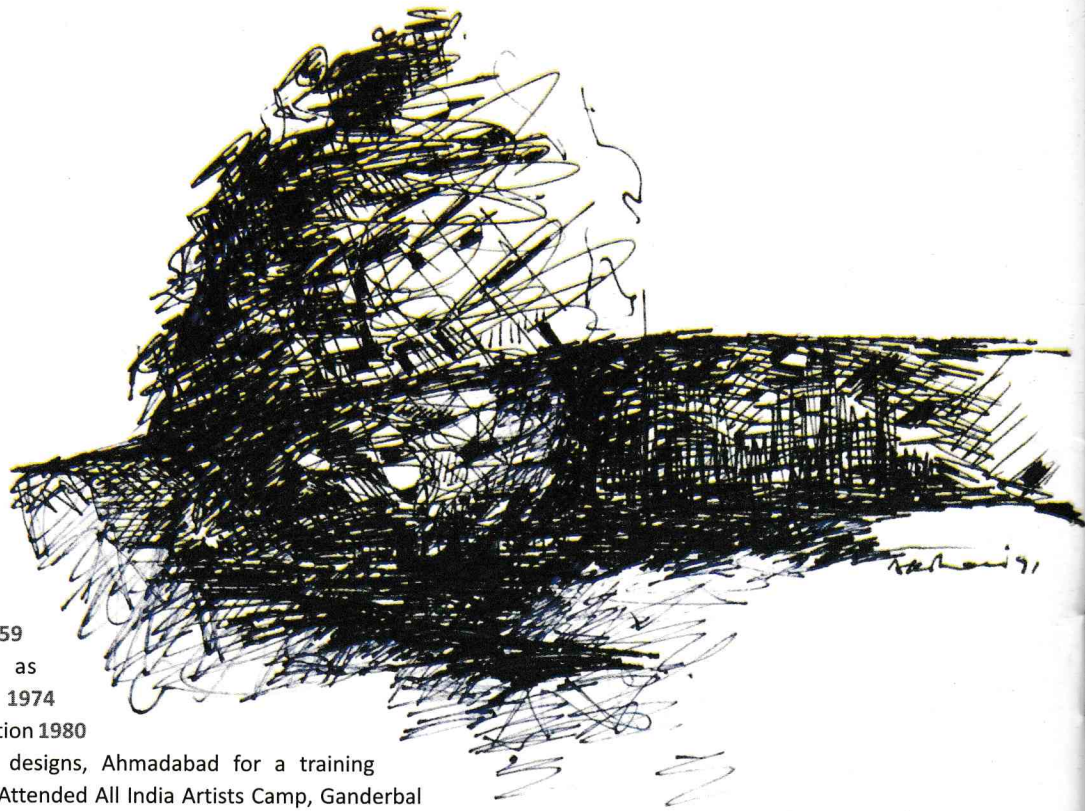
SHEER POETRY

This time it is different. The majority of his works currently on display are comprehensive in their presentation.

A.K. Raina has caught the mood rather at the level of philosophical depths, inspired as he was by the poetry of such renowned poets of Kashmir as Lal Ded.

A. K. Raina, is equally adept in handling, both warm as well as cold colours. And that gives him an enormous range so far as expressing the mood of the hour is concerned. Besides he is semi abstract in his approach to landscaping which enables him to break the cordon of reality.

EVENING NEWS | New Delhi | FEB 5, 1997



A.K. RAINA | Born in Srinagar, 1938

Profile -

- Gave up his studies at college to join school of arts, Trivendrum, Kerala
- Started career as a craftsman 1959
- Started Painting 1965, Elected as secretary, Kashmir Artists Guild (KAG) 1974
- Visited USA to participate in an exhibition 1980
- Selected by National Institute of designs, Ahmadabad for a training programme of "Craft Design" 1981
- Attended All India Artists Camp, Ganderbal Kashmir 1975, Rashtriya Kala Kendra, LKA "Painters Camp Samath", Varanasi 1992
- National Artists Camp Manthulai Jammu, J&K Govt. 1993.

Participation in Exhibitions -

- Annual Art Exhibition, Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta 1968-69
- Annual Art Exhibition of All India Fine Arts Crafts Society, New Delhi 1969
- Bombay Art Society Annual Art Exhibition 1972
- Annual Art Exhibition, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar, Jammu 1966 to 1976
- Rashtriya Kala Mela LKA, New Delhi 1991
- National Exhibition of Art LKA, New Delhi 1989 and 1992.

Group and One Man Shows -

- Kashmir Artist's Association, Srinagar 1970
- Kashmir Group (of five) Travelling Exhibition, Srinagar 1970
- New Delhi and Mumbai 1971
- Kashmir Artists Guild Exhibition, Srinagar 1974 and New Delhi 1975
- 4 Artists Group- Show of Paintings at Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi 1986
- 3 Artists Group-Show of Paintings at Dhoomimal Gallery, New Delhi 1987
- Group Show Trembling Images, Vadhera Art Gallery, New Delhi 1991
- Group Show of Indian Paintings, Sculptures and Graphics
- National Museum, Damascus, Syria 1995
- Group Show of Paintings, SOM Arts- Cultural Centre, San Francisco, USA 2002
- One Man Show, Devlalikar Art Gallery, Indore 2004
- Group Show Parijat Kala Samuh, Devlalikar Art Gallery, Indore 2005
- One Man Show, Dhoomimal Gallery, New Delhi 2005

Awards -

- "State Annual Art Exhibition", Srinagar 1967, 69, 73 and 1976
- "Lalded Award", Srinagar 1979 (J&K Academy of Art)
- "Honourable Mention National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi 1992
- "Senior Fellowship (Painting) Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India" 2000-2001
- "Mira Kala Samman", Indore M.P. 2004
- Kalhan Award for Life Time Achievement" Kashmiri Samiti, Indore 2004

Collections -

- Takes pride in many private and public collections for museums and institutions in India and abroad.

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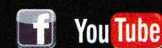
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